

Workshop Report Caribbean Learning Exchange 2010

Learning Exchange on Bleaching Response Planning



Paul Marshall of GBRMPA advising Kemit Amon-Lewis of the USVI on their Bleaching Response Plan © The Nature Conservancy

**The Nature Conservancy
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Background

The Nature Conservancy hosted the Disturbance and Bleaching Response Plans: A Learning Exchange for Coral Reef Managers, in Key Largo, Florida from June 18-19, 2010. This two-day Learning Exchange was developed for Coral Reef Managers from Florida, the Caribbean and Australia to develop bleaching and disturbance response plans. The Exchange is part of the larger NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program partnership with TNC, and is the first of two that will be hosted regionally each year until 2013. The topics of each Learning Exchange will vary, according to the needs and specific objectives of each jurisdiction or geography.

The Conservancy facilitated the exchange, which included regional and global experts on coral reef management, including Dr. Paul Marshall (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority), and Damien Head (Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service), Lauri MacLaughlin (Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary), and Ramon DeLeon (Bonaire Marine Park Authority).

Objectives of the Workshop

1. To share lessons learned from the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on the subject of Bleaching Response Planning.
2. To expand upon existing, or develop new bleaching response and/or communications plans.
3. To foster strong ongoing communication and collaboration between Australian coral reef management agencies and Florida coral reef management agencies.

Expected Results of the Workshop

Participants were expected to leave the workshop with a clear understanding of the successes and challenges faced by both the FKNMS and GBRMPA in their management of bleaching and other coral reef incidents, such as groundings and oil spills. They were expected to have a greater understanding of what happens in terms of management response in the event that a bleaching response plan is in place, and what can happen when there is no formal planning. Participants were expected to go home with a draft bleaching response or bleaching communication strategy near completion.

Methodology

The Learning Exchange agenda was designed to promote creative problem solving, with ample time allotted to the development of concrete management products. Day one opened with case studies and content presentations from GBRMPA and the TNC Florida Keys program. Chris Bergh led a presentation from the TNC Florida program regarding what happens in a major bleaching event without a bleaching response plan, contrasted with what happens when you have a plan in place. This was followed by a Bleaching Response presentation from Paul Marshall and a group discussion on ecological impact assessment and setting thresholds for mass bleaching events.

After the morning of case studies, our discussion moved toward how to adapt bleaching response plans to disturbance events. TNC Florida Keys staff James Byrne presented on what happened during the cold snap disturbance in January 2010 in the Florida Keys as well as how they were addressing the current situation with the Gulf oil spill. GBRMPA staff shared their grounding and oil spill experiences with the group as well.

The participants spent the remainder of the day visiting two field sites – one of which was affected by the cold-water event in January and one that was not impacted.

The second morning focused on socio-ecological impacts of bleaching events as well as communication responses. In the second half of the day, participants spent time in facilitated small group discussions, working on their draft communication plans. By the end of the day, participants had developed fairly robust draft bleaching response plans.

Results, Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

- TNC staff in the Florida Keys are continuing to work with their FL reef management partners to complete their BRP, at the same time that they are in the process of implementing elements of the plan.
- The final BRP draft for the USVI is nearing completion and is going to be distributed shortly for comments.
- Funding from private donations, which may be unsustainable, currently supports disaster response monitoring. We need to look at better sustainable financing options for response monitoring efforts. Bleaching response activities should be budgeted in as normal part of coral reef management activities in the future.
- When we talk about disaster response with our partners (other government agencies, NGO's and academia), we need to think about the terminology we use – because specific words can be much more actionable for those with access to resources such as boats, personnel, etc. For example, the GBRMPA found that when they referred to bleaching response as incident response or disaster response, they were able to mobilize resources much more quickly.
- When we plan for disaster response, we need to also focus on personnel management. We need to carefully examine what happens to our other management priorities in times of coral reef disaster response.

Follow-up Action Plan

All of the participants took part in the Training of Trainers workshop, which directly followed the Learning Exchange. Through that event, they further developed connections with their colleagues, which they can continue through our social networking site. TNC GMT staff are continuing to communicate with all parties involved, to make sure that their respective BRP's are moving forward toward completion.

Evaluation by Participants

Generally, participants noted that the exchange provided a good setting for different geographies to learn successes and challenges from others as they develop mass bleaching response and communication plans. Geographical coverage was noted as an important feature of the exchange, where participants especially appreciated that the exchange included participants from outside a local region. The depth and breadth of experience from all participants was underlined as key to the success of the exchange. Participants were impressed with the different approaches to dealing with issues and challenges – they felt that it was beneficial to learn about alternative approaches.

In terms of making future improvements to other Learning Exchanges, participants noted that it would be helpful to begin the session with a review of existing bleaching response plans, so that participants stay focused on revising and improving their plans throughout the session. One participant recommended that the exchange materials include bios and one

or two goals or commitments from each exchange participant, as a way for others to learn more about each other before the beginning of the exchange. Other suggestions included adding additional scenario exercises to help participants share ideas further, as well as facilitated discussions and role-playing as optional items for future agenda development.

Testimonials

- The Learning Exchange was a great way to learn about successes and challenges that may be experienced when developing a mass coral bleaching response plan from a number of countries and states that are proactively protecting their reefs from additional stresses during severe bleaching conditions. By not 're-inventing the wheel', I've found that I can focus more effort on the real issues and in turn, complete the process more efficiently.
- Those of us working in coral reef management tend to be totally caught up in the practice of conservation. Yet, we are all facing many challenges in common – especially the big ones associated with coral bleaching and climate change. We often struggle to find the time and opportunity to connect with peers, to ponder, share experiences, develop ideas and challenge our approaches. This learning exchange provided an important opportunity to get to know fellow coral reef managers and evolve our thinking, expand our toolkit and become better prepared for the inevitable impacts of coral bleaching events...and to take solace that we are not alone in confronting this major challenge!
- The Learning Exchange was a great experience. I learned a lot about bleaching response planning from the other participants and I think that my perspectives from my jurisdiction were helpful for the people from throughout the region. That's what it's all about.
- I think involving participants from across the globe was invaluable. So often one's thinking can become cocooned and dimensional. Engaging with my international peers broadened my understanding of the challenges we collectively confront and most importantly provided me with alternative ideas and ignited some fresh thinking.